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IVAN SPEAKS

Fedorchenko, S. Z.
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IVAN SPEAKS

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

BY

THOMAS WHITEMORE



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P R E F A C E

THESE sayings on war and peace were set down by Madame Fedorchenko, a Russian nurse, from talks which she overheard among Russian soldiers at the front in 1915, 1916, and 1917. From a large amount of material they are selected, translated, and arranged. These detached utterances of wounded soldiers, many of whom could neither read nor write, lying in their cots, were spoken without premeditation or thought of the nurse's presence. Beyond translation, they are printed absolutely without change. For this reason they penetrate and reveal the mystery of Russian character.

THOMAS WHITTEMORE

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WAR, war! To some expected, unexpected to others. Many a man is unready, unprepared, body and soul. The crude gray forces were driven forth, to be the laughing-stock of the nations, with nothing made clear to them; on the principle evidently that, having lived miserably so far, they might as well die for no reason they knew. Straw was good enough for us Russians to fight the Germans with.

By the wish of Wilhelm, by the order of Antichrist, war has been let loose over the world. War has eaten the corn in the land, and war has cut down nations by their roots. From the beginning of time there has been nothing like it. War is more dreadful than thunder, it is sharper than lightning, and is not more merciful than the wrath of God.

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A CLOUD has gathered amid the clear day; war has come amid the Russian people. The women weep, and the girls, and the little children; the old men brood and swear.

AT first, when they took us, seventeen of us, from our village, we knew nothing, only just felt bad. At every station we raised a row and swore at the girls, and we sang all the way; but we were homesick all the same. Then they began to drill us, and to some purpose, inasmuch as we even fell off in flesh. And they treated us most contemptuously, just as if we had been fools. Yet we were by no means fools. We all were used to farm-work, every mother's son of us. I worked under my father, and he was very strict. The only free time I had was when I worked at a factory for four months. On my way here I cried right along; I felt I was taking

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leave of life. Mother has been dead these fifteen years, yet I kept moaning, "Mother, mother!" as I cried.

OUR mother sent for us all. I came from the factory, and these were her words: "Live, my son, long; but live so that your life may not seem long to any one else."

I USED to attend to a garden. My father was a gardener, and my grandfather also. They were good gardeners. My grandfather learned gardening abroad, and my mother was a gardener's daughter. That is why I am such a soft fellow. From our earliest age we have never seen blood, and have enjoyed flowers, but at the war we live only with worms and beetles. They dug me up by the roots from my garden, like an old pear tree. What sort of a soldier am I?

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I WAS taken to the war as a chauffeur. I had always, from a child, had a knack for machinery, and in Belgium I learned all about motors. I drove my man right up to the Germans. By the side of us rode cavalry in helmets; they charged, hewing right and left. And Gregory, — before the Lord, I am not lying, — after wounding a man, seized him by the collar, threw him down under his feet, and kicked him and stamped on him, till he gave up the ghost. I met Gregory after that, and I shamed him. "You a democrat? No, but a vile hound, that's what you are! Is that what you were taught in Belgium? A German is a man all the same, and you handled him worse than a rat." He wanted to fight me, he was so ashamed of himself.

I HAD but a brief spell of good living. Mostly I lived miserably. And now I

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have risen. I have become an important man. And I laugh at everything. I stopped believing in God while I was still a shepherd boy. I said, "I do not believe; strike me!" There was a great thunder-storm; but He did not strike me. I never particularly cared for life, and did not particularly thank papa and mamma for the gift. But now that they need us for the war, they call us "brothers," and "boys," and "dear children."

WHOSE is the blame? Who can be reproached with the sin? If we only knew that, if we knew! Is it the Germans, is it the Pagans, is it the Austrians, or the Bulgarians? One's soul has been sold, and no man is guilty of the war. War itself has come from the other world, and war itself will finish itself.

I AM learning everything afresh. The

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Lord, the Son of God, said, "Do not kill." That means, Kill, without mercy! "Love your neighbor as yourself," means, Take his last crust; and if he will not give it quietly, hit him with an axe. It was said, "Do not defile your mouth with unclean words"; but here, Sing vile songs about your mother, to make it merrier for your souls! In a word, grow wolves' teeth for yourselves, and if it is too late and they won't grow, here is a bayonet for you, and cannon, to bite your neighbor under his ribs. But to make a real soldier of me, my back must yet be flogged with whips.

I HATE the enemy so, I dream of him at night. I dream I am lying on top of a German, a sturdy fellow, and he won't get killed. I reach out for my bayonet and he takes hold of my hand. I cannot overcome him. I stick my fingers

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in his eyes, trying to make a hole right through to his brain. At last I find the way! And I am so glad, my very blood boils with joy.

HERE you kill a man and get praised for it. Only you don't draw any pleasure from that. What can be worse than taking life? And if you do, you know that you do a forbidden thing. You feel much better if your conscience torments you. If you pay the whole price for your sin, it is gone.

IN times of war miracles happen even to the like of us. How that is, I don't know. My feet gave out; I lagged behind and lay down for a brief rest in a ditch. I thought, "They must pass here, not far off, and I'll catch up with them." There I lay, and heard them marching, marching. Night was going, morning was near; but I was powerless

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to move. I heard them tramping, tramping, nothing but infantry; their boots stamped regularly in time. I thought, "Lord! there are not so many of us around here. Suppose they are Germans!" I raised my head a bit and looked. So far as I could see, the place was full of the dead. They were disposed in companies, in white winding-sheets. I could hear the tramp, but these seemed to lie flat, like a mist. I lay still as death.

WE heard groans, entreaties, questions. We dared not answer; it is forbidden; besides, we did not understand. Woods were all about, and we could not see. But when the moon mounted up, like a rolling ball, we saw; we were surrounded with wounded and cripples, who crept up to us, begging for help. But we could not take them on our horses.

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THE priest called me to him, and said to me, "Your sins are many and great. You are more intelligent than the rest, so you have more to answer for." Had I but known what was coming! We were going there with no thought of blood. Indeed, I kept telling the boys to be careful not to kill the man. But we could not possibly let the scoundrel go scot-free. But when we got there, we began beating him; while he shrieked, we beat him to silence him, and when he stopped shrieking, we just went on. And so it was we killed him, while we never intended to!

HE approached me; but instead of looking for my wound, he began to fumble about my pockets. I felt deadly faint, but anger revived me, and I tried to shriek. He squeezed my throat. I succeeded in throwing him to one side. "Swine that you are," I shouted,

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"dress my wound! I don't need your help to find my purse."

I TOOK aim at him, and did not know who it was, but hoped it would turn out to be a German. I aimed from a branch. I took long aim, and shot very luckily. He fell flat, and turned out to be a German, and healthy as a bull.

I TIED his hands, and when we came to the little wood, I tethered his legs like a goat's. I said, "Sit down, we will rest." He sat, and I at once stuck a cigarette between his teeth. He grinned, but looked very blue. I asked, "Are you an officer?" He nodded. I asked, "Are you a soldier?" He nodded. I could not make it out. I smoked and considered how to make him appear as important as possible, when I brought him in, so that I might get a reward. I finished smoking. "Get up," said I,

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“and come along.” He was silent. I repeated it sternly, but he remained still. Then I looked. He was grinning, and the cigarette between his teeth had gone out. I touched him and found he was dead.

WHETHER I lay long, I do not know. There were stars. One had to move, and I crept up the hill. On the other side of the hill I knew were the Germans. The rockets were all to the left, and I was glad of that. As I crept on, I heard their talk. I looked, but there was nothing to be seen, only, close at hand a fire blazed up. A sturdy German had lit a *primus*, and was boiling coffee—and the scent of it! “O Lord!” I thought, “if one only had that, how good it would be!” My mouth was full of saliva. I crept on; he sat waiting for his coffee and looking at the fire. I fell on him from behind, to

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strangle him quickly. He died silently, evidently from fright. I took the coffee and drank it, burning myself in my haste. I drank it up, and carried off the coffee-pot and his helmet.

I UNBUTTONED his uniform and found the portrait of a young lady: here it is. I don't carry it about merely because she's handsome, but I feel sorry for her, the poor orphan. He used to warm her with his heart; and now I'm sorry for her.

WE don't have to answer for anything. Whether the Germans win or whether we win, no one has to answer for it. But among the Germans, it is said, every one is held responsible, and has to know what he does. Are they taught as we are taught, ra-ta-ta, and ta-ra-ra? No! They are shown how their enemies live, and what their cus-

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toms are. And when they return after a fight, they are questioned as to what they have done. Each one carries out what is ordered. The Germans will teach us many things, but while they are teaching they will torture us.

I WAS so stupid once that, when I lay down to sleep, I used to fold my hands in a cross on my breast, in case anything appeared to me in my sleep. But now I fear neither God nor the devil. After I had stuck a bayonet into a man's stomach, it was as if something had fallen away from me.

WHEN the Lord started the Sun on its course in the sky, laughter blossomed among men. They say the Sun is to die some day, and it is true that things point that way. Even since I was born, I can see that men laugh less than they used to.

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FATHER, father! I ask you to teach me, for Christ's sake. I am afraid, I fear death. If I come to Paradise they will ask what good I have done; and what have I done? Nothing. If I worked, my heart burst with anger, and when I rested, I slept without stirring.

THERE is no sin in that, that I can see. If I do a thing, and God sees it all, it means that it depends on his will to permit it or not to permit it. If my little one goes near the fire, I'll drag him away and spank him; or if I see his intention in time, I will not permit it. Now God sees everything. If anything bad happens, that too is his will. There is no sin in God.

Whatever one may say to him, he hits you in the face. For a "Just so!" he'll knock your teeth loose. Well, I could not stand it, but one might not complain. Complaints are not accepted

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against messieurs the officers. And what sort of a monsieur was he? He had been serving as a clerk in the office, and doing everything for himself. And now he has climbed to be a man! No colonel or general would knock one about so.

I COULD not endure it. Was I a boy, to be so beaten? I went to report it; but instead of justice, I was sent to prison, and again beaten; and when I returned, I was ridiculed. Life was very hard for me. But here I forgive everything. We are all suffering together.

TAKE the officers, now, the command; of course they are not always kind to us. Still they do no little good. They teach you at the very beginning, not merely to handle your rifle, but if need be, to read and write; and that will be of the greatest use to us after the war. And who sees that we are clothed,

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and shod, and fed? To take away our command would be the same as taking a door from its hinges. We should be running out into every kind of weather. So better keep still.

HE received a letter, and shut himself up for some three hours. Then he called me. "Ivan," said he, "tidy up the hut." But it had already been tidied up that morning. "Yes, sir!" I turned about and moved things from one place to another. Having turned about long enough, I went out. A bit later he called again. He was sitting with the letter in his hand and seemed strange. "Ivan, tidy up the hut!" said he. Again I turned things about, and went out. A bit later he again called me, for the same thing. What, thought I, can have so upset him? When I had left the hut, he shot himself.

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THE two of us, Semion and I, carried our sheep by turns. It was alive, but did not hinder us much. Still, we got so tired, we sat down to rest, and before we knew it, fell asleep. Through my sleep, I heard Semion softly calling me, and saying the Germans were quite near. Sleep fell from me as if it had never been. I sat up, staring into the dark night like an owl, and seeing nothing. Neither could I hear anything but the booming in my own ears from fright. When I had recovered my breath a little, I did hear: true, it was the Germans! And from the time I left home I was afraid of nothing so much as being taken prisoner. Our sheep somehow rid itself of its bonds and plunged into the thicket, making a considerable noise, which fear magnified into thunder. Who else would think of an animal at such a critical moment? Yet my Semion jumped up,

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and rushed after the sheep; and that was the last of him. The Germans were after him in no time; they fired; then I could hear that they were getting farther and farther away. So I ran in the opposite direction, and toward morning I found our men. But no news of Semion. And he has a family at home. And all for a sheep!

OH, yes, it hurts when you get wounded! But you get over it, and live on. You eat and drink and talk to people, and are again a man among other men. But the poison gases! To pay for those, many, many Germans should be killed. Nothing could be worse than gas. It twists you and tortures the soul out of you. You won't ever be glad again, not for one little hour.

I CANNOT say it was very terrible.

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When I was wounded, I forgot all the world; there I lay and shrieked, and felt no shame. And I cannot say that it hurt so very much; but the thought came to me that I was now alone in the whole world, and so I might do anything. And so I lay and shrieked, then called for "Mother!" That's all. Then they picked me up. The wound proved of no importance.

My leg was all covered with boils, and burned like fire. He said, "He's pretending." Think of that, when I wanted to die, I suffered so! How could I work at digging trenches? The clean bandage felt like lead, and if sand got inside, it felt like hell-fire, so intense was the torment.

Oh, what a terrible time we had! When the first wagon arrived, Semion Ivanovitch alighted from it and said

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to his wife, "Get the children ready, and get together our really necessary things; we are ordered out of here." The woman sank down weeping and wailing at the top of her voice. A crowd assembled in an instant; it was as if a thunderbolt had struck the village, and all were crying. Some were striking their heads against the ground, others tearing at their hair. One old woman fetched out a young heifer, put her arms around her neck, and howled; and so did all the dogs, for company. Well, they had to be loaded into the wagons by force, as they could not be persuaded. Most of them barefoot — rain, mud, cold, a terrible, terrible time at its very worst.

How many ruined children I have seen here! One was so thin that I cannot get her out of my mind. Think of it! In a single hour soldierdom made

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a wreck of her life. Her mother was beaten to death, her father hanged, and her sister outraged and tortured to death. She was left—not more than eight years old!—with a baby brother who had not been weaned. I began to give him bread as gently as I could, and tried to stroke his head; but he squealed like a wild animal, and with that cry set off to run over anything that lay in his way. After one's eye had lost sight of him, one could long hear how he cried like a beast from grief and loneliness.

WHEAT, every ear of it, praises God. It is the trumpet of the Archangels. But amid the corn dead soldiers are lying, ours and theirs. The corpses are fresh, and do not yet cause a smell; the field smells more. And among the corpses, children are wandering, lost. A woman who had decided to run

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away, took a baby on her arm, and a little one by the hand. The little one broke loose and was lost amid the corn. They were mostly two-year and three-year children. The people here have handsome kiddies, but they are so frightened that they have long forgotten how to cry; they seem to have lost their voices. They seem stupefied, and dirt and tears have dried on their faces. And some are bloodstained; perhaps they have been beaten. Our Sisters of Mercy began to wash and feed them. They were as silent as dolls. Only when they had gone some ten versts, did they recollect themselves and begin to howl. War is hard on the children.

IN the wood stood a cross, some one's grave. I sat down there and did not feel uneasy. At midnight clouds collected under the firs, and the fog crept

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coldly over me, and sadness seized my heart. I remembered all my griefs. Evidently he must have died suddenly, to be buried in a grave in the middle of the wood. And he must have suffered much, for now that he's dead, he sows sorrow all around him.

IN that wood we used the pots that had held the water brought to wash the dead with. Lots of berries and mushrooms grew in that wood, but no one cared to gather them. People said that beasts and birds used to go there to die. It was an uncanny place. In times of drought mists would rise above it, like curling smoke, and the breath of corruption came from it. At night people were afraid even to walk past it. Voices were heard there, and those who heard them did not live long.

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THAT — a church? More like an old chicken-house! It makes me laugh. For I have been, from a child, a diligent churchgoer. Now, their houses are like palaces, with clean beds, wardrobes, and cupboards, sofas, crockery, roses in the front yard, cut and trimmed as if by the barber's hand. But the church might be a stable. It is not so with us. Cockroaches, dirt, a heavy smell that sticks in your nose, that's our *izba*. We sleep in it until the birds wake up; then we eat our fill of bread, and are off to the fields. But we are zealous in worship, and build nice houses for God.

ABOUT Masha, a great grief has befallen me. By ill luck I went home. I wrote to say that I was coming, but they did not get the letter. Thirty versts I went by rail, then hired a horse and arrived in the evening. The

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window was lit up and I looked in. Masha was seated, and beside her some stranger who had put his hand on her breast, and was sitting quietly so. My soul felt like bursting. I wished to break in, but reason restrained me. I knocked at the window. She rose so quietly that it was evident everybody knew about it, and that this kind of thing had been going on long. She came to the window, shaded herself with her hand from the lamp, saw me, and trembled. And I was so glad at their fright that I shook all over. She went back and looked at the man. She told him, and he prepared to run away; but I struck her a mortal blow, and in the morning I drove away to the town, and spent all my money with girls there.

I STILL had ten days left after the journey, and from the first moment

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sadness seized me, to think I should so soon have to go back. I did n't have a single hour's happiness. I was afraid to let my heart thaw; I was expecting great grief ahead of me. I shan't again accept leave. God take it!

I NO longer want to go home, I saw such things there. I will buy some land here, and will behave well to the inhabitants, so that the blood spilt may be forgotten. More than a little of our own blood has also been spilt. The land is fertile with blood, and it will yield good crops. People will soon forget the war.

I WAS not to blame. The ice on our river had broken up with the spring. The ice crashed like thunder. Our river is a deep one; steamships go in it. So the river with the ice moved in the early morning, and I had gone to a

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bath in the suburb, and was returning, being weak after serving in the regiment. I heard a cry; I looked up and saw two boys leaping from one block of ice to another, and the ice was twisting about like shavings in the fire. "Uncle, help us! Uncle, help us!" But how was I to help if I did not wish to lose my own life? I did n't help. Then folk collected, shouted, and screamed; and the boys were drowned.

I TOOK one swallow of it. It burned, it grew dark before my eyes; a moment later the fire spread through all of me with my blood. I had to laugh against my will, just like a little child, and I forgot all my troubles. That's how I began to drink.

I SHOULD like to drink a barrel of vodka. That was what I always had to be at when I was unhappy. And now,

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as one's life is that of the beasts, it would be better to be like a beast in all.

WE loved our mother, and did n't wish to cause her any grief. Our father was a drunkard and used to beat her till she was red all over. I used to pray God to let me grow up quicker. "Wait a bit," I used to think. "By and by you will learn what it means to drag mother about by her hair!" But when I grew up, I took to drink. At first my father and mother used to beat me, but I grew stronger and beat my father, and (sin though it was) I beat my mother, too. There was a fine defender for you!

A WOMAN should be kind and respectful, not envying another woman for her husband, a careful mother of her children, an orderly housewife, zealous toward God, and faithful to her home.

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Oh, you woman-spindle, twisted by toil! While the peasant labors in the field and works till he gets a bent back, let the wife enter the hut like a sun, sweep up the rubbish, bake the bread, and teach the children sense and knowledge!

I FEEL queer here sometimes at night before I fall asleep, if I am tired. I seem to be not myself, and I try to think of some word, some gentle tender word, such as "blossom" or "dawn," or something like that, something sweet and pleasant. Then I will sit on my cot, and keep repeating that word to myself, ten times or more. And then it seems as if a kind hand caresses me, and so I go to sleep.

My heroic action was this. We were lying close up to their defenses, and for four days had not been able to climb

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out; we lay like reptiles. There was not a dry spot; one could not get accustomed to it. And H——, the ensign, had been caught on the wire when we had started to attack. At first he asked for help, called on the men by name; but one could not show one's nose without being shot. Then he only groaned and breathed heavily. That went on for four days, and he still lived. It is a sin to grumble at God, but here one says, "Why be careful of one's life if one cannot spare one's soul?" I could n't endure it, and took him off the wire; but I got wounded. Then there was an attack, and our men captured the post.

I AM very handsome myself. Women swarm about me like bees round a flower, and I'm not one to refuse them; but I am always expecting things to be different. For what is it like? — just

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like dogs or cows, who smell one another and are mated. Perhaps it will yet come about; I am not yet twenty-three. Beauty must be good for something, or else it's only like sugar in tea.

AND then the staff sent some Jews to us. It was a joke. One roared like a whale, and another, as soon as he came, lay down as if dead. He was pale, but his ears wagged. Another, more forward, was always creeping up to the officers and whispering. But there, whisper or no whisper, we must all keep together. We sat in the trenches all night, and when we got there we entered a house with Stepa Kovalev, and saw a lot of goods of all kinds. We did not know what they were all for. All sorts of articles! Our enemies do live well! We spread a blanket and began to put things into it. What was for each of us we could settle later. And, truth

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to say, it was a sin. All the same, if we did not take it, others would — there was no owner. There is nothing worse than to abandon a house, but it was not pleasant to stay there, either, especially not for a woman. O, Lord, when one sees a woman, one neighs like a stallion. Then, weep or not, one had to act. As we were wrapping the things in the blanket our Jew appeared. "Lads," he said, "that won't do." We were silent. He went on jawing and we held our tongues. He became excited and shouted, and the captain came. He was amused, but could not help himself, and had to forbid it. He laughed, but ordered us to give up the things. Well, the Jew got it hot from us and from the captain. He went off to the hospital.

HERE I am homesick for birds. I remember my boyhood, not only for the

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beatings I used to get, but also for the delight I had in birds. If Dad, as sometimes happened, would not let me into the house, I used to sleep all night somewhere in a hollow among the vegetable gardens. There were elder-shrubs all around, and the birds' berries. Before the sun rose, the birds would be tuning up in the bushes, trying their voices. In the early morning how their voices feel the sun! So full of joy are those voices, the sun could not but appear in answer to that resounding call, could not but appear.

I WAS allowed to go out. I went to see the animals and the birds. What beauty unspeakable there is in the world! Some birds are clothed in feathers of every hue in the rainbow, and have eyes like precious stones. And such animals! Incredible! There is the lion, now, the king of beasts. The

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crowd stands around him, gazing with idle curiosity. But he lies quiet and won't stir, and looks right through you, as if you were not there at all. He is seeing something of his own, quite different. You feel the strength under that hide, a strength like cast steel; and his very calm is terrible. Believe it or not, as you will, but the earth breathes. Only your ear is not always attuned to hear it. Life makes too great a noise around you; we never have leisure, either to look or to listen closely. But there are peculiar days and nights, when the soul tears itself from the material and sees and hears earth live, as you might say, her own separate life. She stirs the swaying grasses and the waters; breathes in vapors, in mists, in the fragrance of flowers, in the exhalations of all living things. So immense is the life of the earth that man can sense it only by

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feeling, not from knowledge. I think monastic life is the real thing, the stillness that could make many things clear; but where find such retreats?

It sometimes happens that something good comes to you, perhaps a letter from home, saying that all are well, and send their love. And forthwith your soul weakens, and you begin to have all sorts of things the matter with you, and the sum of your sins increases. No! a man should have a stiff soul, tight-laced, trained to think of only one thing; then would there be no room for sin.

Do not pine, lad; what's the use? So very little will be wasted out of life, the merest trifle. You're so very young. The war is making havoc of the whole world. One soul is like one pea in a bag, which, without being shaken,

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finds its way to the bottom. The main thing is — preserve life.

ONE thing a soldier regrets, which is that he has a head on his shoulders. Ah, if he had only arms and legs, he would fight without sorrow, and gain glory for his Tsar.

A BLUE flame flashed up; a lad ran to the light of it, and grasped it in his hand. The fiery bloom burned his hand, but he did not open it. His heart sank within him, for there were voices and a great noise in the wood; sometimes that, and then again such an unearthly dead silence, as deafens the ear not less than noise. He closed his eyes tight, and through his eyelids he saw devils of various shapes and sizes, who all rushed up to him, but could not strike him. He walked through fire and through water, and through deadly

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thickets, through this incomprehensible devilish mirage. The live fire blazed in his hand, burning him to the heart, but uttering promises. "Carry me, lucky one! for the great good fortune I bring. Think of something; give me some order; I will get and bring anything wished for. Let not devilish temptations lure thee. Do not destroy thy soul, nor anybody's soul. This bloom has power in the night, if carried through the mirage. Fortune, success and all good things shall be thine, and joy, love, and heart's ease."

THICK and ancient woods; one cannot see through them, one cannot pass through them; one can only sing about them in ancient songs. Such woods stand with no path in them. There is such strength in the earth as can overgrow man's roads with wild grasses, and bury them beneath fallen branches,

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and drive swift currents over them. In the wood there is a different life, not for men's eye. And the devil is there.

ONE says to another, "He is no sort of man if he has not read Pushkin and those other writers." Just think what the fellow who says that imagines! Why, none of us have read them; and are we really not men? He's read them, and yet there's no sense in him! He's weak in body and weak in character, he's easily frightened, he's cross with himself and with the others. He's not a man but a skunk, and that's all your Pushkin's worth. But among us there are real heroes. I can't forget that one, he insulted us so.

HE mimicked very well and seemed cleverer than the other simple folk, but when it came to business he was no good. He could tell anything and in-

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vent anything, and put songs and tales together well, but he lived only on someone else's hump. Such a fellow could perhaps have found a place in a town; there people loaf the whole day; but the village keeps hold of your hand. If you have n't a hand you can't feed yourself. "

WHAT'S the use of talking? As if the like of us were ever asked to talk! At home I was a good scholar. I used to go to the teacher's every day for a separate lesson. He liked me for my cleverness; and indeed I was apt in all things. If I heard a poem but once, I did not have to learn it, I remembered it. I figured out problems in my mind. I could mend a watch or clock as quick as I could look at it. I could understand anything. So I understood that this was not the kind of people that were wanted for the war. And now I am in

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the infantry; here I sit, like a dog leashed for hunting, and see and know nothing.

NEVER had I seen such a jasmine. It was not a shrub but a tree. The smell held one's soul. In such a thicket of jasmine were we posted. We lay down; one could hardly breathe, so strong was the scent of the jasmine. In my head, an old wife's fairy-tale seemed to be repeating itself. There were no real thoughts, nor weariness nor fear; only the fairy-tale. But soon the tale ended. The thing fell right among the jasmines, and I ceased to dream, as Stepanyack, with an oath, began to regret his legs. He had lost both of them. I had lost an eye in the same moment. Let the smart old wife tell him stories.

I REMAINED there; had they forgotten me? I was on guard. I lived there a

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day, and ate dry rusks. The second day there were no rusks left. On the third day I was so hungry I went to search for some mushrooms and found them. I boiled water in a tin and swallowed it with the mushrooms, but threw it all up. What was to be done? No one came for me. By the evening I was ready to die; my stomach ached and twisted, and I was sick. I had an attack of cholera. Then they fetched me to the barracks. Such was my fate.

INVENTIONS, say I, fibs! all that stuff about the soul. The soul is a good thing in the body. And the body is good when in constant activity. Therefore, work, look around you, attend to earthly things. They keep talking of the soul, the soul! and at the same time live like swine.

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Go, go, do not wait! Go to beg in the village. Seeking the Lord goes a strange man with a little lad, — a gray one with a white one, — blind and bold, beyond our sight onward to the blue sea, to the edge of the earth. With labor to Paradise, for the maimed and the sinners — out of the thick darkness. Go wanderer, over the earth, winter and summer.

I HAVE got a little property by the war. I did not rob; and what money I have received was given me by a Jewish woman. I took their part. I was looking on when our country-folk, with whips, were making an old Jew gallop over a hedge. He was a hundred-year-old Jew, with curls, dry, with white socks on his legs, and with hair yellow-gray. I went up to them. "Don't you fear God? The Jew is old. What a sin!" They let him go, and the Jewess

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thanked me and gave me money. I took it. Ten kronas!

I THINK I shall have time to run there. I do so want that shirt; it is a nice one, and I want to see the woman, the laundress. A fine woman, she has given me no offense. And an Austrian came to meet me — I from one end of the village and he from the other. And the woman's hut was at the Austrian's end. I rushed into the hut and seized the clothes on the shelves, just what there was; then seized the woman by her breasts and made for the door and ran. But they shouted and fired. Not one of them hit me! And I had got four pairs of trousers and a warm shirt. I now have a dowry, ready for my wedding.

I WENT to the window; tap, tap! A woman opened it, a timid woman, who

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trembled and did not speak. I asked for bread. On the wall hung a cupboard from which she took bread and cheese, and she began warming some vodka on a *primus*. I ate, but there was a noise in my ears. I thought no power could tempt me from this spot. Again came a tap, tap! at the window. The woman opened as she had done for me. I looked up and saw an Austrian tumble into the hut. We looked at one another. A piece of bread stuck in my throat till I was ready to vomit. What we were to do, we did not know. He sat down and took some bread and cheese. He gobbled it and tucked away at it no worse than I had done. The woman served the vodka hot, two cups of it. And we began to drink just as if we were chums. We drank and ate, and lay down on the bench, head to head. In the morning we parted. There was no one to give us any orders.

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SHOULD I inform on him, or should I not? I wanted to, his speeches were so very much against all law. It was not alone that he abused the command—he went for the Tsar himself. Had I informed, it had been good for me; our company commander would have had to give me a bill of three roubles, and those lower down would have respected me. And you know it is those lower down who are nearest to us. Yet I held my tongue. I did not take any leaflets, as that would have been against my oath of allegiance; but I listened, and that was sin enough. But he was such a fascinating speaker. If you ask me why I did not inform, I could not tell you. But the fact remains—I did not. He would bewitch you. We are only too well prepared. Wronged in every way, humbled, living worse than animals, waiting all the time for somebody to teach us; so we listen. We do

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not follow him — we are afraid; but we do listen. As to informing, God forbid!

As soon as it was dark, we went. They helped us down into their trench. What a trench! More like a palace. And don't the dogs live in clover! Coffee and rum the first thing. They chattered away, but every other word was "Kamerad, Kamerad." Their officer distributed leaflets, very polite. We took them — why not? Most of us could not read, so no harm was done; and why should we be rude? So we ate and drank and talked, and now it was time to go home. Half an hour later we were firing at each other. Comradeship is one thing, service is another.

Do you think one has to be a special kind of man to kill another man? It does not take much effort to do that.

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You come home, you find want everywhere; the children half-starved, the wife dried to a stick, and blaming you and nagging at you for it all. Your own belly rumbles all day long, with hunger. Then a thief comes by night and tries to steal your only remaining wretched horse. Well, when you catch him at it, all you think of is to put the evil thing out of the way. And so you kill him.

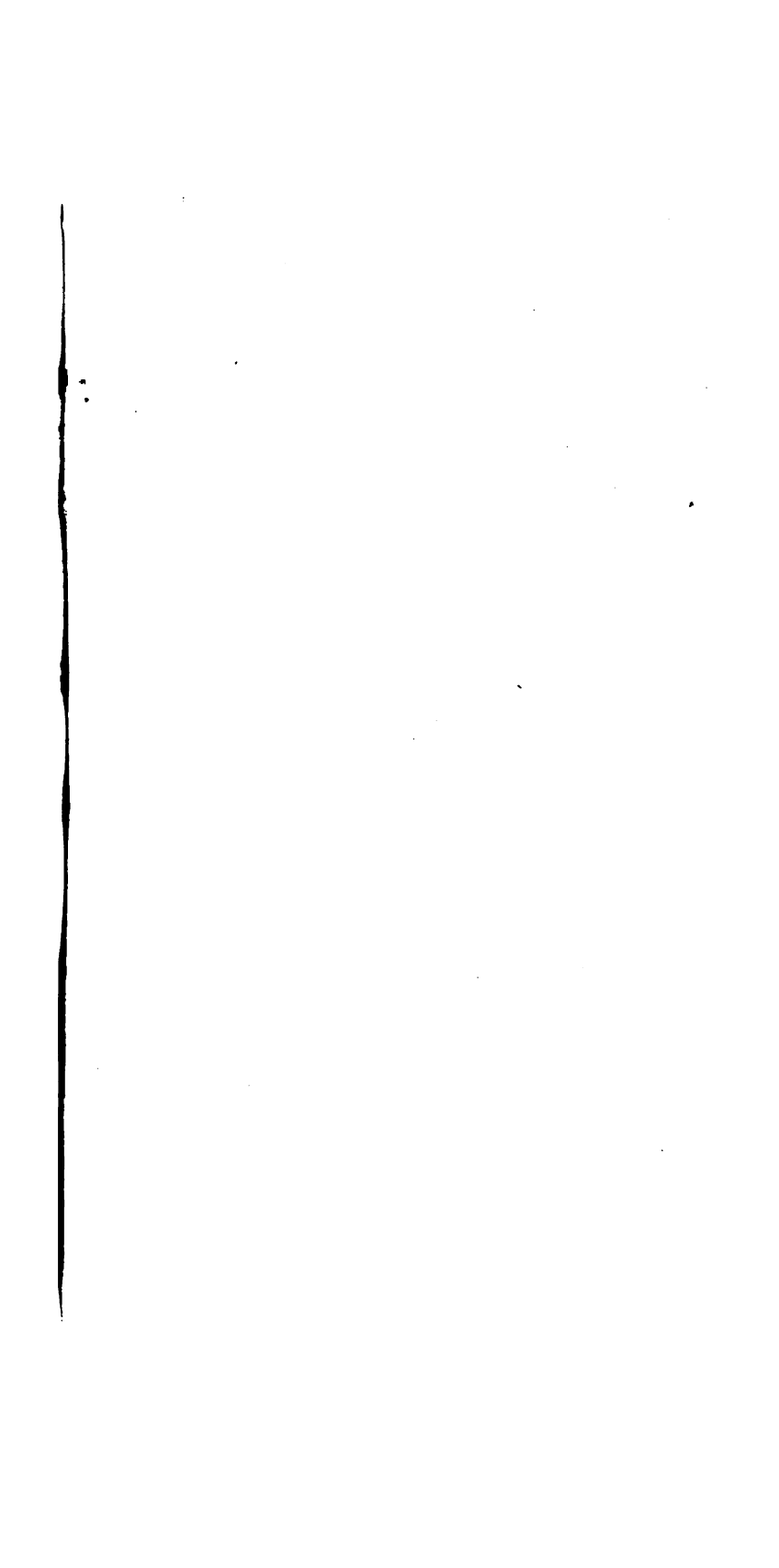
THERE is no kind feeling in my soul for those who have remained at home. When I read that things are going badly for them there, I am glad. Let them, think I, eat one another up like reptiles for having sent us into torment.

It is beyond human strength to destroy that monster — War. There is no end or limit to it. So how could anybody be leisurely thinking about do-

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mestic affairs or comfortable living? Think of your soul. That is what everything depends on in the next world. As to this world, our life in it can hold neither light nor joy.

THE END



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